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A  
S E R M O N

Concerning the

**Folly of Atheism;**

Preached before the

Q U E E N,

A T

W H I T E - H A L L,

F E B R U A R Y 22. 1693.

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T H E I R M A J E S T I E S.

Now Lord Arch-Bishop of *CANTERBURY*.

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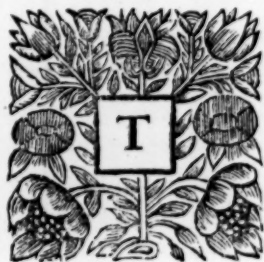




A  
S E R M O N  
CONCERNING THE  
**Folly of Atheism.**

P S A L M XIV. 1.

*The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God: They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.*



**T**HOUGH *the Being of a God is, in Religion, the first and most fundamental Article; yet it may be prov'd by some foregoing Principles of Natural Reason.* This *may be* done, but the attempt seems unnecessary in a Christian Congregation, where the

Members profess, not only, That *there is a God* who *made* them; but also, That there is a *Messiah* who *redeem'd* them.

Taking it therefore, here, as a *confessed Principle*, That *God is*; I shall make it my business to represent to you these *Two Things*:

1. The Folly } of those who live with-
2. The Vileness } out God in the world.

For these two *Remarks* are here offer'd by the Royal Psalmist in the *Text*; *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God: they are corrupt, they have done abominable works; there is none that doth good.*

Holy *David* does, here,

In the 1<sup>st</sup>. place,

Take notice of the Folly of those who *live without God in the world.*

They can never be without his *Essential Presence*, nor always without an inward *sense* of it; there is no worldly Charm that can, perpetually, keep the Conscience from such reflections; but *whilst* they remain insensible of a God, *their way is their Folly.* And

1<sup>st</sup>. *They*

- 1st. *They want Knowledg and Judgment.*  
2dly. *They want Wisdom and Discretion.*

1st. *They want Knowledg and Judgment,* and commit wonderful mistakes about Principles common to Mankind. For as a *natural Fool* may sometimes speak a shrewd and seasonable thing; so an *irreligious* one, tho he has, in other respects, ability of mind (as *Judas* and *Demas* themselves had, being *wise in their generation*;) yet with reference to the Existence of a Deity, he is guilty of gross and palpable Errors: None deserve those Epithetes more than these that follow; viz. *That there is an Effect without a Cause.* That *an insufficient Cause can produce a perfect and sufficient Effect.* That *something (without an Almighty Power) can come out of nothing.* They are to be derided rather than confuted, who shall have the confidence to say, That a *House had no Builder*; that all the *Materials* fell into that useful *Order* by *Accident*; and that the *Master* of the House *sprung* at last, out of the very frame of it: The *Atheist* does not say this in terms, but he

he maintains that which is equally absurd : For, seeing the *Heavens* and the *Earth* are imperfect beings, and did not, could not make themselves ; he that denies that a God, or a First, and absolutely perfect Being, was the Maker of them, does by consequence, set before us imperfect Causes and Effects, existing without a Cause. And seeing all things are made in *Number*, *Weight*, and *Measure*, either he shews his stupidity in not *discerning* the Footsteps of Wisdom in the wonderful frame of Nature, which appears the more regular, the greater portion a man has of the knowledg of the Lines and Figures of Bodies, and the Rules of Motion ; or he ascribes all this to *Chance* (which yet is a word he ought not to use, who makes all Causes necessary) and maintains, that *Confusion* is the most wise Parent of *Order*.

Seeing, also, he makes the *Soul* to be the *Temper* of the *Body* ; and the substance, and the modes and motions of it are as distinct from Understanding, as is the matter and movement of any other Engine, from a reasoning mind ; he makes *Nothing* to be the

the Spring of *Something*; that is, the Constitution of the Body, which hath no thought, nor any thing from whence it can possibly come, to be the Cause of Thought, of Judgment, of Wisdom, of Conscience.

But (as one of that sort of men has written in one of his Intervals) 'Tis very hard 'to believe; that to produce all the several 'and curious *Organs of Sense and Memory*, 'could be the work of any thing that had 'not Understanding: And he might have added, *Much more of the Understanding it self.*

Decam.  
Physiolog.  
p. 130, 131.

And this Error is still the more gross, because the Godless person holds it to be an Error, whilst he denies the *Creation* of the World out of *nothing*; and then sees not that it is one, when he speaks of the *Original* of the *Soul* out of that which hath nothing of *Soul* in it. Such *Inconsistence* is a plain indication of want of judgment; and ungodly men are, in many more particulars, at variance with themselves.

As for example; In *Health* they are *Atheists*; and in *Sickness*, *Superstitious*; They say, all we do is *necessary*; and yet *blame*

B

some

some Actions, and commend others. They have no *Faith* about Divine *Prophecies*, even those which have been evidently fulfill'd in the Coming and Death of Christ, and the precise times of them; yet they can put their trust in *Astrology*, which is not so much as *good guessing*. They *scoff* at Good men, and yet cannot but wish, that *their latter end were like theirs*. They mock at the *Being of Ghosts*, in the *light*, and dread them in the *dark*. In *company* they deny the *Existence* of Evil *Spirits*; and fear to be *all alone* in the *night*, lest Evil Spirits should *fetch them away*. In fine, men that live without God, are so destitute of Knowledge, that they are a *riddle to themselves*.

Nay, even whilst they think they have asserted their Liberty, and that they are perfect Masters of themselves, they are *led captive by the Devil at his will*; for he rules in the hearts of the *disobedient*.

This shews *that part* of their Folly, which consists in want of *Knowledge* and *steddy Judgment*. And there is,

2dly, A great deal that gives us demonstration

stration of the *other part of it*, their *want of Wisdom*, even that of the *Serpent*, the doing of things for their own benefit, safety, and comfort. For,

1st. *They use means contrary to their ends.*

2dly. *They run an infinite hazard, upon inconsiderable motives.*

1st. Those who *say in their hearts*, *There is no God*, manifest their *want of Wisdom and Discretion*, by using means contrary to their *End*. For one great pretended End of *Atheism* and *Unbelief*, is a *deliverance from fear*, \* the making of the mind *easie* in all a man's thoughts, and words, and actions, by freeing it from that terror which is struck into it by the apprehension of a God, as an Observer, a Judge, and an Avenger; as one that will call them to a severe account for *whatsoever they have done in the flesh*, whether it be good or evil.

\* Lucret. l. 1.  
Humana ante  
oculos fedè  
cum vita jace-  
ret in terris  
oppressa gravi  
sub Religione,  
&c.

But the *Fear which hath Torment*, cannot otherwise be wholly prevented, than either by *Innocence*, or *Repentance*, and *Application to God*; and for the Expedient of the



*Epicureans*, it brings into the bosom that *Anxiety* which it pretends to expel; for men having had experience of their own impotence and imperfection, and of the weakness and deceitfulness of others, and observing the daily *changes* and *chances* of this world, can by no means be secur'd against them, but by the belief of an *overruling Providence*, and the performance of such things as may secure to them the Protection of it. He only who is not conscious to himself of guilt unrepented of, who is sincere in his Duty to God and Man, is capable of remaining without despair, if he should perceive the frame of Nature ready to be dissolv'd. Our Saviour's question carries its answer along with it; *Why are yee fearful, O yee of little faith?* A weak Faith is scarce sufficient to keep out fear and trouble: What Peace then can there be, where there is no *faith at all?* What Peace can there be to the Wicked, remaining such, who are without God, without Providence, without inward Comfort, without help in Nature; without hope in this World, or the Other?

2<sup>d</sup>ly. The



2dly. The want of Wisdom, in irreligious men, is seen, by the *infinite hazard they run, upon inconsiderable motives.*

The hazard they run, is the *loss of Body and Soul for ever*; which loss, though the Atheists believe not, yet they cannot say 'tis an Impossibility.

And upon what Temptation is it, that they make this perillous Adventure?

Why! for the sake of a few vile Lusts, and inordinate Passions, the fruit of which is present shame, and inconvenience: They lose their hopes of being like *Angels* for ever, that they may enjoy a few *Brutal Pleasures* for a few days on earth.

A man would mortifie all those unruly Appetites, with respect even to the *dignity* of his own nature, and for the Interests of this life, upon the account of which this foolish sinner parts with a blessed Eternity.

Wisdom would prescribe Temperance, Justice, Gratitude, Peaceableness, decent speaking, and the like, if there were no other World; much more does it require obedience to the reasonable Commands of Religion, when they are means to the  
comforts

comforts both of this life, and that which is to come.

Nothing was more remote from Wisdom than the choice of *Eſau*; what man of common understanding would have loſt his birth-right, to ſatisfie an impatient appetite, which might in a little time have been appeas'd, without the loſs either of Birth-right, or Health? Who then is the fooliſh Merchant? He, doubtleſs, who whiſt he deals in the World, parts with a preſent certainty upon the probable hopes of very great gain; But will not part with ſo much as a Vice which is of no profit to him (with ſo much as *an Oath* which offends others, and weakens his Credit among them, and brings him no imaginable Advantage) upon the *Hopes* of Life eternal.

Now the Folly of ſuch Perſons is the more notorious, becauſe, whiſt they are blind, they look upon themſelves as thoſe, who ſee furtheſt into the Cauſes of things. Thus it happen'd to the ungodly among the *Romans*; *profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools.*

Now

Now to such Folly, as consists both in the want of Judgment, and of Wisdom in the best things, may fitly be joyn'd, that which *David* (in the second place) takes notice of in the Text. The *vileness* of those who live without Religion: Which is *two fold*;

1. The vileness of their *Temper* and *Disposition* ; They are *corrupt*.

2. The vileness of their *Practice*, *They have done abominable works* ; *There is none that doth good*.

1. Atheistical Persons are *vile* in their *temper* and *inclination*. *They are corrupt*, or they have corrupted, first themselves, and then their works. There is rottenness at the *heart* of *them*.

*Na-bhal* is the Original word. From thence a Writer (a) on the Text, will have that of *Nebulo* derived. He fails in his Etymologie, but his meaning is good; For he would suggest thus much to us, that it is the *knaveish man* who *bath said in*, or  
to

to his heart, *There is no God.* He is of so villanous a disposition, as, whilst he believes there is a God, to wish there *were none*, because his Vices cannot approve themselves to Wisdom, and Justice, and Holiness.

Immorality is the beginning of Atheism, and Atheism is the strengthening of Immorality; for the Immoral first would be glad there were no God, and what they desire they readily believe; and when once they so believe, then they are confirm'd, and encourag'd in their Vices, and sin with Assurance.

\* *Tarq. fatuus,*  
*in jano.*

For Atheism begins, not from the Arguments of a sound Mind \* in a sober Temper, but in a sensual Disposition, which inclines Men to seek out for colours, whereby they may deceive themselves into an Opinion of the safety of living in a course that pleases them.

What they assert through sensuality, that they do, and when they have done it, they study to make a defence, both that the sting of Conscience may not give any pain to them, and that they may have something to say to those who reprove them.

It

It was from the corrupt hearts of the Rulers, Elders, Scribes, *Annas* the High Priest, *Caiphas*, *John*, *Alexander*, and others;

It was (I say) from their love of popularity, and their fear of being look'd upon as openly confuted, that They endeavour'd to stifle a plain *Miracle* which God wrought by *St. Peter* and *St. John*, in healing a lame Man, instead of being convinced by it.

When They saw \* the boldness of *Peter* and *John*, ' and perceived that they were ' unlearn'd and ignorant Men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them ' that they had been with Jesus; And beholding the Man which was healed standing with them, *they could say nothing against it.* But when they had commanded them ' to go aside out of the Council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What ' shall we do to these Men? For that indeed ' *a notable miracle hath been done by them, is* ' *manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem,* ' *and we cannot deny it.* But that it spread ' *no further among the People,* let us straitly ' threaten them, that they speak henceforth ' to no Man in this Name.

\* Acts 4. 13,  
14, 15, 16, 17.

‘ To the pure all things are pure, but to  
‘ the defiled, nothing is pure, but the very  
‘ Conscience is defiled, the sense they have  
of things is (by their ill temper) perfectly  
corrupted.

If Men had in them a principle of *Pro-  
bity*, and were inclin’d to seek necessary  
Truths, and the Rules of Goodness, with  
impartiality, they would certainly find  
them; but having some Lusts or other  
earthly Interests to gratifie, the corrupt  
Heart, biasseth the Judgment; *and they will  
not understand nor seek after God.* When  
you speak of a *just God*, to an *unjust Man*;  
of a *holy God*, to an *unclean Man*; of a *mer-  
ciful God*, to a *cruel Man*; of a God that is  
*good*, and does good, to a *covetous Man*; of  
a God of *condescension*, to a *proud Man*; of  
a *long-suffering God*, to a *rash and revengeful*  
*Man*; of a God that *rules over all*, to an *un-  
tractable Man*; of a God that will call every  
Man to an *account*, to an *unjust Steward*; you  
speak of Pearls to Swine: nay, each of these,  
has not only no value for such a God; but  
there is in them, a wicked prejudice against  
the notion of such a Deity; *there is an in-  
terest*

terest (tho' a wretched one) made by their earthly Affections, in their Hearts against the Being of him. When you speak of a *Heaven* where they neither eat nor drink to an *Epicure*; of the Idolatry of the worship of *Diana* to *Demetrius* and others who get their living by making Silver *Models* of her Temple; you speak to those whom Pleasure and Interest have rendred deaf.

If a Man could see into the Breast of a *godless Person*, what a Cave of horror would he look into? What ungovernableness of Spirit would he behold; what an unwillingness to own any Lord over it? What heighth of Pride would he find there? *The wicked through the pride of his* Psal. 10. 4. *countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.*

How is such a one puffed up with this vain conceit, that He understands the deepest secrets of Nature, and is wiser than all the Men of all Ages, who have by the things that are seen, ascended to the acknowledgment of an invisible God? What uncharitableness would he see in such a Person, rendring him distrustful of all the



World as designing, and unfaithful ? for they that live without God, mete by the Measures of their own dishonest Hearts.

What disgust would be given him by many filthy and monstrous Lusts, darkening, by their impure steams, the understandings of knowing Men, and driving them impetuously into such beastly Follies as are the shame and peril, as well as the degeneracy of humane nature ?

From Hearts so corrupt cannot but proceed *first, wishes of Atheism*, and *when* they have deluded themselves into a conceit that they have their wish, there cannot *but follow* (what I am next to Consider.)

2. The *vileness* of their practice. *They have done abominable works ; there is none that doth good.*

*First*, There is a natural tendency to such abominable practice, in the Heart of godless Men.

*Secondly*, It is true in fact, that their Practice is, the *Omission of all good*, and the *Commission of presumptuous evils*.

1. *There is a tendency to such abominable practices in the Heart of Godless Men.*

Some



Some *Unbelievers* have pretended to regulate their practice by Honour, by Decency, by Discretion, by cunning Craft; they have pretended to sin by Method, and to act with worldly Safety.

But where there is so ill a Heart, so brutishly inclin'd, so given up to a reprobate sense, so void of the Grace of God; it will, upon temptation and opportunity, break forth into the most execrable abominations.

Our Laws suppose all Murthers, Adulteries, Thefts, and other such violations of them, to be acted by Persons, who have *not the fear of God before their Eyes*. That is the Bridle which will restrain them, if they are not past restraint.

And if those, who *believe* in general, *that God is*, but consider not what they believe, and forget him, and have him not in their Thoughts, commit very black Crimes: certainly they preserve not themselves innocent, who are by a corrupt Heart, enchanted into this worst of persuasions, that *there is no God at all*.

All

All find it difficult to live a holy and blameless life after having entertain'd good Principles; after much consideration, and striving to master themselves, and Prayer to God for his Assistance. How improbable then is it, that those should be free from presumptuous evils, who neither fear God, nor regard Man; who make Sense their Guide; who rather give up the Reins to brutal nature, than endeavour to govern it.

And, 2dly, It is true in fact that their practice is the *omission of all good, and the commission of presumptuous evils.*

1. For good, that, saith David, is generally *omitted* amongst them, *There is none of them that doth good.*

It is true, that ungodly Men do sometimes that which is *materially good*, to others; but it is not from the true motives of Goodness. The *unjust Judge* did justice, but 'twas upon *Importunity*, and to avoid being wearied. Ill Men do good, not because it is an imitation of God, or pleasing to him; b. cause it is beneficial to the Community of which they are Members;

bers; because it is a means to *find mercy at that day*: they will not give up *a cup of water to a Disciple of our blessed Master Jesus in the name of a Disciple*. For they cannot act by principles which they have not: but, with the *Publicans*, they do one Courtesie to receive another; and they have a hook in every gift: They sometimes do a good office for good Men who may honour them before the People, and serve them in another way: But the Creatures they most readily support, are Parasites, Flatterers, the Instruments of their Lust, Injustice and Revenge, and such who *know their several Abominations*, and for that reason are *fear'd*.

Therefore the Good they do is not *properly good*. But

adly, For their Evils, they are *formally evil*; They are all manner of Immoralities in the *Root* of them: For if *Atheists* actually forbear any Evil, it is not from Conscience (for that they have not) but from fear of the Law, or of those they depend on, or publick Infamy, or expence, or disease,

disease, or from impotence, or want of opportunity.

There are *two sorts* of their *evil practices*, which I shall take notice of, from the *second Chapter* of the *Book of Wisdom*.

1. The *first* is, *abominable sensuality*.

2. The *second* is, *cruel and unmerciful oppression*.

1. For the *first*, *Their abominable sensuality*, holy *David* observes in *verse 3.* that *they are altogether become filthy.* Their filthiness is thus describ'd in the 6, 7, 8, and 9th Verses of the forementioned *Book of Wisdom.* 'Come on, ---- let us enjoy the  
'good things that are present; and let us  
'speedily use the Creatures like as in  
'youth: Let us fill our selves with costly  
'Wine and Oyntments; and let no Flow-  
'er of the Spring pass by us. Let us crown  
'our selves with Rose-buds before they be  
'wither'd; let none of us go without his  
'part of our voluptuousness; let us leave  
'tokens

'tokens of our *joyfulness* (that name they give to their Lusts and Revellings) in every street.

This course, being very *expensive*, brings on,

The *second part* of their abominable practice, which is *cruel and unmerciful oppression*. The Author of that Book doth therefore, in the *tenth Verse*, go on after this manner, 'Let us oppress the poor 'righteous man; let us not spare the 'widow, nor reverence the ancient gray 'hairs of the aged.

'Let our strength be the law of Justice.

So that whensoever any one shews his Neighbour a *godless Man*, his Neighbour can immediately shew him a Monster made up of the Goat, the Swine, the Wolf, the Lion; if I may allow him any thing so generous as, they say, there is in that King of the Forest.

After all this manifestation of the *Folly*, and *vileness* of such as are *without God in the World*; It is time in the

*Third place* to think what *is fit*, in this

D

case,

case, for those to do, *who believe in God ;*  
both *first as to themselves.* and  
Secondly, *To those who believe not.*

And, *first, for our selves,* who believe in God, and in Jesus Christ whom he has sent ; It is necessary to keep our *Faith* from *deadness*, by the exercises of holy *Living.*

The *Devils* do more than the *Atheists*, for they believe ; but because they promote infidelity in others, and obey not themselves, they are Devils still.

If we own a God, it is our duty to *glorifie him as God ;* otherwise our *Faith is vain*, and the unfruitfulness of it will be the *Aggravation* of our sin ; and if we desire not to *retain God in our knowledge*, and to honour him with the Talent with which he has intrusted us ; he will deliver us up to those vile Affections over which a Victory is to be obtained by a living Faith.

But if we adorn our Belief by an agreeable Life, that will be a means to save our selves,

selves, and to gain others; at least, to put to silence the Ignorance of foolish Men.

II. With relation to such,

1. All should *learn to distrust*, and to be watchful. For what Confidence can be put in a Man that thinks not of a God that will call him to an Account? Who measures all things by Power and personal Humour or Interest? Who if he pursues his Principles, must never speak Truth, nor do Justice against his private Ends?

2. All Persons should *pray to God*, not to work Miracles before Unbelievers, not to call up Men from the Dead, and send Ghosts to convince them; but to give them Grace to attend to the *sufficient Means* which are offer'd to them in the Gospel.

3. All judicious good Men should endeavour to become part of the Means of their Conversion, by sound Discourse, by exemplary Lives, and by bearing, not with mean Cowardise, but with Courage and Patience, their insolent Scorn; not *answering fools according to their folly*; but



shewing them that True Religion can govern those Passions, which make them, as *raging Waves*, to foam out their own shame.

4. It concerns all *Masters of Families* to defend their Threshold against the Footsteps of the Ungodly, who will tempt their *Children*, and their *Servants* to Lust and Prodigality, and to the Supports of them, Theft, and imbezlement of Goods.

c. All *Churches* should, as far possible, discountenance *Superstition*, and looseness of Life.

(1.) They should banish far from them all *Frauds* abusively call'd *Pious*, all fabulous Legends, all feigned Miracles, all absurd and superstitious Doctrines and Practices, which beget and nourish Atheism; for these, where they are discover'd, blemish Religion in those who are educated in such Societies; for they have taken that in which they have been bred, for *All Religion*; and rejecting that, with it they reject all. They distinguish not betwixt the Impostures of Men, and the Truths of God, the Light of whose *Word* is taken from them.

(2.) Where



(2.) Where there are not such *Frauds*, or they are *not discover'd*; Men who have liv'd *loosly*, and without any Principles, not being able to content the Conscience without some Religion, will at last run from the extream of *Atheism* to that of *Superstition*. After having liv'd *Infidels*, they will die *Idolaters*.

There is now where so great a Harvest for Romish Missionaries, as where Men, under the true Light of the Gospel, have no Religion at all.

And a Church that will keep out *Popery*, must, as far as it can be done by its Discipline, mortify Lewdness and Profaneness.

6. It behoveth all *Civil Gouvernours* to animadvert upon Atheism, as that which supplants the Foundation of all Humane Society.

This *Psalms* is supposed to have been penned upon occasion of the Conspiracy of *Absalom*, and the general Wickedness of that Generation which gave occasion to it, and to the spreading of Atheism. It was an Age so corrupt, that *David* seems to compare

compare it to the State of the Old World  
 Gen. 6.11,12. before the Flood, at which time *the Earth*  
*was filled with Violence, and all Flesh had*  
*corrupted its Ways.* We read in *Numb. 21.*  
*That those who spake Evil of God, spake Evil*  
*of Moses.* They who will not fear God,  
 will not inwardly reverence Man. They  
 who scoff at Religion as *Priest-Craft*, will,  
 under the Name of *Prince-Craft*, despise  
 Civil Government. If such universally pre-  
 vail'd, they would ruin all Kingdoms, by  
 taking away all Faith and Trust, which is  
 the Ground of Commerce. They would  
 make all *Publick Pacts* and *Covenants* of  
 none effect, by removing *Conscience*, which  
 ties Men to the performance of their *Words*  
 and *Promises*; when *Interest*, join'd with  
 Power, commands all Men that have no Re-  
 ligion to be no longer *Slaves* to them.

*Atheism* supplants all *Laws*, by invalidat-  
 ing the belief of all *Evidences* and *Oaths*.  
 What judicial proceeding can there be,  
 for the preservation of Mens Persons and  
 Properties without *Witnesses*? And how can  
 an *Atheist*, a false Man, be a faithful Witness?

Whap

What a Mockery is his *deposing upon a Gospel*, which he does not believe? Or his *taking up the Name of a Deity*, of which he says, as *St. Paul* of an *Idol*, *that it is Nothing*?

By reason of *Atheists the Land mourns*; they are the greatest Enemies of it. And if (which God avert) it should ever come to pass, that there should not be good Men enough to ballance their Impiety, we should soon become a *Desolation*.

Pray we therefore to the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and say, "Arise, O God, maintain thine own Cause; remember how the "foolish Man blasphemeth thee daily.

And, to this King *Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, to the only Wise God*, let us give from our Hearts, *Glory and Honour, for ever and ever. Amen.*

F I N I S.